Department of Highways
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NEWSLETTER

Somerset Northern Bypass

No. 1, November 2001

KYTC to Hold Public Information Meeting on Potential Bypass

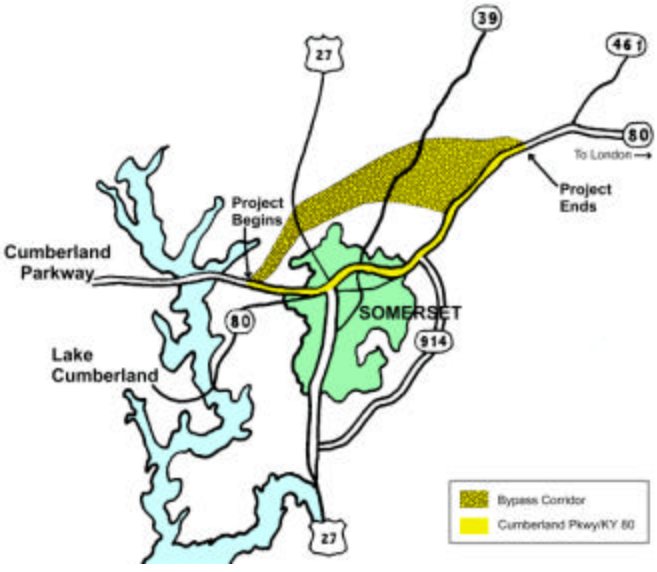
The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) will hold a public information meeting to discuss a proposed northern bypass of Somerset on November 27, 2001 from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Center for Rural Development, 2292 South Highway 27, in Somerset.

The proposed project is a new four-lane, fully access-controlled facility*, eight to ten miles in length, that extends from the Louis B. Nunn (Cumberland) Parkway west of Somerset to KY 80 east of Somerset, bypassing the city on the north. Other alternatives considered will be (a) upgrading existing Cumberland Parkway/KY 80 through Somerset to a fully-access controlled facility and (b) the No-Action (no-build) alternative*.

The project is intended to improve connectivity to other major roadways, accessibility to community facilities and services, and overall traffic flow in the Somerset area; to accommodate increasing through traffic and truck volumes and improve traffic safety by providing a fully access-controlled facility; to provide system continuity for the interstate system (I-66) if developed; and to fulfill the legislative mandate set forth in Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (See Project History on page 2).

This first public meeting will be held in an open-house format. Citizens can come at any time between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. and view handout materials, an audio-visual presentation introducing the project and its public involvement program, and then view maps of the project area showing general design proposals and environmental issues identified to date. Staff from the KYTC and its consultants will be on hand to answer questions.

The purpose of this meeting is to provide general information about the proposed project and to hear public concerns, comments and questions. Citizens also can submit written questions and comments to the KYTC about the proposed project. Information provided by the public will be used along with the results of ongoing engineering and environmental studies to develop project alternatives. These alternatives will be presented for public review and comment at the next public information meeting tentatively scheduled for next summer.



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* See Commonly Used Transportation Terms on page 3.

Project History

The history of this project can be traced back to the concept of the East-West Transamerica Corridor, also known as I-66. Originally this highway was to run from coast-to-coast, starting in Virginia and ending in Southern California. In 1991, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) identified high priority corridors on the National Highway System. The East-West corridor was identified as one of these high priority corridors.

As a result of the ISTEA legislation, a national East-West corridor feasibility study was conducted. The study concluded that the entire coast-to-coast corridor did not meet the economic feasibility criteria established for the study. However, it also was determined that further analysis could find some corridor segments to be feasible from a state or regional perspective.

In 1997, the University of Kentucky Transportation Center conducted a study for the KYTC that concluded that the Southern Kentucky Corridor of I-66 was feasible. This study identified the Somerset to London segment as a priority segment. Based on the results of this study, funding for the continued development of the Somerset to London corridor was established through the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).

TEA-21 identified Somerset to London as a high priority corridor within the feasible portions of I-66. A planning study comparing a number of alternate corridors between Somerset and London was completed in June 2000. As a result of this planning study, a northern corridor was selected for continued development. This corridor was then separated into two projects: the northern bypass of Somerset (this project) and the remainder of the corridor east to London.

The Somerset Northern Bypass and its alternatives are being evaluated as an independent project. The intent is that the project be developed in such a way that it will function effectively, whether or not I-66 is ever developed in this area. However, it must be designed to meet interstate standards so that it can become a part of I-66 if and when that facility is constructed.

Public Involvement Program and Citizen Advisory Council

Public involvement is a key component in the development of this project. As part of the public involvement program, the KYTC will be providing information and soliciting public comment on the project alternatives over the next two years. This will be accomplished by:

- periodically publishing this project newsletter,
- preparing press releases for the news media,
- creating an information repository at the KYTC District 8 headquarters in Somerset,
- disseminating fact sheets and handouts on an as-needed basis,
- holding public information meetings and a final public hearing to exchange information with the general public, and
- helping establish and facilitating an active citizen's advisory council.

A major initiative to better involve the community in the development of this project is the citizen's advisory council. The council will consist of a group of individuals who will represent those citizens affected by or otherwise interested in this project. Issue areas likely to be represented on the council include: agriculture, economic development/tourism, environment, government, and neighborhoods.

The council's job will be to assess detailed information presented by the KYTC and its consultants, to voice the ideas and concerns of members of the community, and to make formal recommendations to the KYTC regarding project alternatives.

If you would like to recommend someone to be on or work with the advisory council, please complete the enclosed insert (mailer) and submit to Cathi Blair at the KYTC. The address is listed on the mailer.

Steps in Highway Project Development

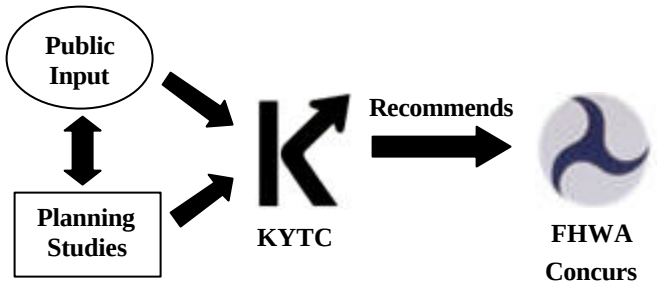
Getting to the construction of a major new highway project is a three-phase process that can extend over a prolonged period of time. The three phases are: (1) preliminary engineering and environmental analysis, (2) design and land acquisition, and (3) construction. The following outlines the key components of each phase.

Phase I – Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Analysis

During Phase I, preliminary engineering and environmental studies* are undertaken, a public involvement program is implemented, and an Environmental Impact Statement* is prepared. (This is the phase we currently are in on the Somerset Northern Bypass project.)

After all the studies have been completed and the KYTC and the public have examined the impacts of the proposed project, a recommendation will be made by the KYTC to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) on what alternative should be implemented.

During the life of this project study, the KYTC will hold at least three meetings to obtain public input. The advisory council also will hold several meetings, the first of which is tentatively scheduled for early December 2001. A second Public Information Meeting is scheduled for late next summer to present project alternatives to the public. The Public Hearing (the final public meeting on the project) is presently scheduled for early summer 2003. At the Public Hearing, the KYTC will present the preferred alternative.



Phase II – Design and Land Acquisition

If a build alternate* is recommended by the KYTC and approved by the FHWA, the KYTC will then develop detailed plans and specifications for the project. Determining the required utility adjustments also is a part of this work. After the physical limits of construction have been determined, the KYTC will work to acquire the right-of-way needed to construct the proposed facility.

Phase III – Construction

After the development of the construction plans and specifications and the necessary right-of-way along the project corridor has been acquired, construction can begin once the necessary funds are made available.

Commonly Used Transportation Terms

Provided below are some commonly used transportation terms that will help clarify some discussions in this newsletter and at public meetings.

Intersection – the point at which two (or more) different roadways meet at the same elevation, or "at grade". Intersections are often controlled with stop signs or traffic signals.

Interchange – a type of construction that allows the crossing of two or more roadways using overpasses and underpasses, removing the potential conflict of intersecting traffic. The roadways are connected by on and off ramps.

Full access control – restriction on traffic such that entry to a four-lane roadway is limited to interchanges with on and off ramps.

Partial access control – control of traffic such that entry to a four-lane roadway is partially restricted. Access to the roadway may be provided by a limited number of widely spaced intersections and, in some special locations, by interchanges with on and off ramps.

Build Alternate – under the build alternative, one of the build options, i.e. a northern bypass or an upgrade of existing Cumberland Parkway/KY 80, would be pursued.

* See Commonly Used Transportation Terms.

No-Action (no-build) Alternative – under the no-action alternative, a proposed bypass would not be built and the existing Cumberland Parkway/KY 80 would not be upgraded. Only routine maintenance and repairs of the existing roadway would take place.

Preliminary Engineering Studies – are technical studies of the engineering aspects of Phase I work. The purpose of the studies is to determine where the project will be located and what it will look like, including the general geometric design and access control. The results of these studies are the basis for the preparation of construction plans.

Environmental studies – are technical studies of environmental issues and resources such as air quality, archeology, ecological resources, hazardous materials, historical resources, noise, and socio-economics. While these studies are used as support for the Environmental Impact Statement, they usually are quite technical and therefore not written for the general public. However, the results of the environmental studies will be presented to the advisory council for use in their deliberations.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) – a document required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when a federally-funded or permitted project would have a significant impact on the natural and/or human environment. It is an integrating document that describes the environmental effects identified in the technical studies and analyses and by the public. The EIS is to be written so that it can be understood by the general public.

Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) - is an early version of the EIS circulated to agencies and the public for comment. The DEIS, a major focus of the final public hearing, identifies the feasible alternatives studied and the impacts of each. It also will identify the preferred alternative.

Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) – is the final version of the EIS that incorporates agency and public comments.

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